

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)

October 2003

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Purpose

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) services are an integral part of the Salt River Fire Department and S.R.P.M.I.C.'s Employee Assistance Program. Debriefing services are provided, upon request to employees and family members who have been subjected to or while mitigating any major trauma or critical incident during the course of his/her duties.

What is a Critical Incident?

A Critical Incident or a Traumatic Event is defined as:

An event outside the range of usual human experience, which has the potential to easily overcome a person's normal ability to cope with stress. It may produce a negative psychological response in a person who was involved in or witnessed such an incident.

Critical Incidents in a workplace environment include but are not limited to:

- Aggravated Assaults
- Pediatric drowning, and/or deaths
- Robbery
- Suicide or attempted suicide
- Murder
- Sudden or unexpected death of a work colleague
- Hostage or siege situations
- Discharge of firearms
- Vehicle accidents involving injury, death, and/or substantial property damage
- Acts of self harm by persons in the care of others
- Industrial accidents involving serious injury or fatality
- Any other serious accidents or incidents

Emotional Reactions to a Critical Incident

It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional or stress reaction after a critical incident. Sometimes the emotional reactions occur shortly after a critical incident and sometimes

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they are delayed for some time. The severity of the reactions and the time frame over which they occur varies from person to person.

Sometimes the stress reactions last for a few days and then subside. Sometimes the reactions continue for a few weeks or a few months before they start to subside depending upon the severity of the critical incident and the frequency of critical incidents in people's lives.

With understanding and support from loved ones or close friends the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. When severe stress reactions persist, professional assistance from a Counselor is beneficial in assisting the person manage the condition.

Some very common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction in a traumatized person are:

Physical	Thinking	Behavioral	Emotional
Nausea	Slowed thinking	Substance abuse	Anxiety
Upset stomach	Difficulty making decisions	Excessive checking & securing	Fear
Tremors (lips, hands)	Difficulty problem solving	Angry outbursts	Guilt
Feeling uncoordinated	Confusion	Crying spells	Grief
Profuse sweating	Disorientation	Social withdrawal	Depression
Chills	Difficulty calculating	Suspiciousness	Sadness
Diarrhea	Difficulty concentrating	Increased or decreased food intake	Feeling abandoned
Dizziness	Memory problems	Marked changes in behavior	Worry about others
Chest pains (should be Checked by doctor)	Difficulty naming Common objects		Wanting to limit contact With others
Rapid heart beat	Seeing event over & over		Wanting to hide
Increased blood	Distressing dreams		Anger

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pressure			
Headaches	Poor attention span		Irritability
Muscle aches			Feeling numb
Sleep Disturbances			Startled
			Shocked

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Adjusting To the Experience

The human mind and body usually has good self-healing mechanisms which help people get through these emotional reactions. These processes can be significantly assisted by the emotional affected person engaging in the following:

Acceptance

Recognizing their own reactions and acknowledge that they have been through a highly stressful experience.

Excessive denial or lack of acceptance of their feelings may delay the recovery process.

Support

Seeking out other people's physical and emotional support.

Talking about their feelings to loved ones and close friends who will understand what they are going through.

Sharing with others who have had similar experiences

Going Over the Events

Allowing the memories of the critical incident to come into their minds, as there is a need to think about it and to talk about it

Facing the reality bit by bit, rather than avoiding reminders of it, helps them to come to terms with what has happened

Expressing Feelings

Expressing feelings rather than bottling them up.

Talking about experiences and feelings are natural healing methods for these types of events.

Taking Care of Self

During periods of stress, people are more prone to accidents and physical illness. It is important that they look after themselves during this period by:

- Driving more carefully
- Having sufficient sleep

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- Maintaining a good diet
- Having adequate rest

The Positive Effects

After traumatic experiences people frequently become wiser and emotional stronger. They are better able to cope with the everyday stresses of life. It is frequently a turning point where they re-evaluate the meaning and the value of life and appreciate the little things that often they had overlooked.

What is a CISD?

Two services are available - Defusing and Debriefing.

Critical Incident Defusing

On some occasions following a critical incident, some employees may experience severe emotional stress as a result of that incident such that they require urgent assistance. In such cases it is not appropriate to wait for the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing service to be provided.

Supervisor's should be aware and be able to recognize, employees who are experiencing these severe forms of stress as soon as possible after the incident. Battalion Chief notification should be discreetly made, and the personnel removed from duty and placed in contact with a C.I.S.D. Team member.

The Defusing service should be followed by a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing service at an appropriate time.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing is a group activity offered by C.I.S.D. trained members from both the Salt River Fire and Police department members and should involve all employees who were directly involved in or who witnessed the critical incident. Management and other personnel not directly involved with the incident should not be involved in the Debrief activities.

The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing is preferably carried out after all post incident services and enquiries have been completed (i.e. police reports, medical attention, internal investigation etc). The Debriefing, to be effective, should be completed within **72** hours of the critical incident.

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The Purpose of CISD's

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing services should be offered to all employees who were involved or who witnessed a critical incident. The Debrief is provided for the following purposes

1. To provide professionally guided review of impact of the incident on the person's life
2. To enable ventilation of emotions
3. To provide reassurance and support
4. To educate about trauma reactions
5. To advise on symptom management
6. To minimize the potential for the development of psychological problems
7. To assist the person return to normal levels of functioning
8. To identify individuals who may need additional counseling

The CISD Process

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing is a group process for all individuals who were involved in or who witnessed the critical incident. The Debrief service is based on the Mitchell model and consists of the following processes:

- **The Fact Phase**
 - Elicits the facts - the What Where When and Who - from the Group
- **The Thought Phase**
 - Leads the discussion into the personal perspectives of the incident and prepares for the next phase
- **The Reaction Phase**
 - Brings the individual feelings resulting from the incident up to the surface as far as participants wish to do so
- **The Educational Phase**
 - Brings the participants back to functional levels. Provides information on stress reactions occurring or likely to occur and practical ways of dealing with these reactions

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○ Re-entry / Summary Phase

- Summarizes the pertinent points which developed during the debrief and distribution of Information Booklets for self and family

○ Post Debriefing

- Debriefers available for individual contact with any participants who may wish to discuss any issues privately.

CISD Awareness Briefings

All Line, Supervisory, and Chief Officer's who are responsible for organizing responses to critical incidents in the workplace are encouraged to attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Awareness Briefing of 1 hour's duration.

The Briefing defines the traumatic incidents, which are classified as critical incidents. Attendees are made aware of the effects of traumatic event upon personnel involved in those incidents and the role that Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) processes play in helping personnel deal with the emotional impacts.

A contingency plan for dealing with such issues is proposed where such plans do not exist so that Managers and Executives can be prepared for such situations.

Additional Counseling Assistance

After a Critical Incident, individuals may need additional Counseling assistance in getting over such an experience. Their family and close friends may be good judges of when such additional assistance may be beneficial.

Individuals should seek additional professional assistance when:

- The intense feelings or physical sensations are too much to handle
- If emotional levels are not returning to normal levels within a reasonable period of time
- Physical symptoms continue past a reasonable time
- Continuation of numbness and emptiness feelings
- Necessity to remain active in order to avoid thinking about the incident
- Continuation of nightmares and disturbed sleep

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- Unavailability of other persons or groups with whom to share emotions
- Relationships and work is being affected as a result of the incident
- Increased intake of alcohol and/or other drugs following the incident
- Any other ongoing changes in emotions or behavior that are causing concern

Please contact APS (Employee Assistance Program) 24 hours a day at (602) 274-1401 or at (800) 327-2384.